

Lime Lighting On The Folk Theatre As Ritual

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India is a nation which is bound with numerous rituals and traditions. This diversity is formed by the states and their unique culture and traditions. Tamil literature is considered be the classical literature which has great epic poems, novels, mixed with music, songs, dance and drama. Tamil culture is also blended with numerous forms of arts in music, dance and martial arts. It has a separate place in the history which exhibits the strength and wealth of the ruling king. There are many poets who have written different forms of poems and dramas to communicate with the common people. They have used these folk theatres as a medium to educate and take things to the people. This has served as a major entertainment for the people in the village. Among them the major form of theatre is Therukoothu, Kuravangi Attam and Sevaiattam.

This traditional form of storytelling has started with the epic tales of Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas. They are a cluster of stories and incidents but still only major tales are enacted like Sita kalyanam, Draupadi Sabatham. They have made a point of registering the major characters of the tale like Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, Ravana, Dasaratha, Kausalya, kaikeyi, Bharata, Sumithra, Hanuman, Sugriva in Ramayana and Krishna, the Pandavas – Yudhishthira, Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva, Draupadi, Kauravas, Duryodhana, Bhishma, Karna, Dronacharya, Shakuni, Dhritrashtra, Gandhari, Kunti in Mahabharath. It is full of emotions like happiness, anger, and vengeance, where it has served as a medium for conveying moral messages rather than entertaining the rural people.

Therukoothu is the traditional Tamil street theatre practised in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. It serves as a form of enlightenment, a ritual, entertainment and a medium of social instruction. The themes usually form Puranas, Epic poems and life of Great warriors. The most commonly enacted Puranas are Tamil version of Ramayana; Kamba Ramayana by Kambar and Mahabharath. The whole play focuses on Draupathi and this character is so beautifully crafted in such a manner of symbolising the whole women society with her beauty, grace, wisdom and bravery. The actors of the Therukoothu take special care in registering the characters of the play. The music and the verses are recited along with the play and it plays a vital role in conveying the depth of the character and the meaning. It also makes the audience to visualise the image of the grand dynasty and real characters in few seconds. This Therukoothu can also be called as kattikuthu. The term **Therukoothu** is derived from the Tamil words *Teru* ("street") and *Kuttu* ("theatre"). The word "Kattaikkuttu" is derived from the name of special ornaments known as *kattai* (or *kattai camankal*).

This Therukoothu is of different types based on the dramas including Nattu Koothu, Kuravai Koothu, and Valli Koothu which depicts the state and the culture of Tamil people. Samaya Koothu is to enact religious dramas and religious topics. There are still more some forms of Koothu like Porkaala Koothu, Pei koothu, Thunangi Koothu which focuses on the war in the state and the martial arts of the state. The famous Chakyar koothu is practised in Kerala which has the basic root from Therukoothu. This Therukoothu is also been mentioned in Silapathikaram.

The play usually starts by evening and prolongs till the early morning. The people from far apart of the village get prepared with their family members and travel miles to see this Therukoothu. The artists of the play are trained to sing in high pitch so that it reaches all the audience gathered. Traditionally they don't follow any dialogues all the messages are conveyed in the form of songs. The artists wear heavy and complex costumes and bight and elaborate makeups. They give special definition to the eye and lips to clearly express the emotion of the character. Towering crowns and sparking shoulder plates were wore to show the strength of the character. The artists were usually male, who performs the role of female also. In later days female artist were included. The musical instruments were usually so simple like *Harmonium*, *Mirudangam*, *Mukhavinai*, *Kanjara*, *Nathasuvaram* and *Thala vaadyam*.

This Therukoothu is popularly enacted during the month the first month of *Chittirai*, which is considered as a ritual celebration for twenty-one day. Yakshagana and Kathakali have lots of similarity with Therukoothu. Where Kathakali is celebrated as classical art and Therukoothu is considered as a folk art. They had common themes like,

- *Draupadi Kalyanam* -The marriage of Draupadi
- *Supattirai Kalyanam* -The marriage of Subhadra
- *Alli Arjunan* -The Marriage of Arjuna with Alli
- *Pancal Capatam* -The Vow of Draupadi
- *Arjunan Tapam* -Arjuna's *tapas*
- *Krishnan Titu* -The mission of Krishna
- *Abhimanyu Cantai* -The defeat of Abhimanyu
- *Karna Mokshayam* -The defeat of Karna
- *Patinettam Por* -The Battle of the Eighteenth Day
- *Aravan kalappali* -Sacrifice of Aravan in the Battlefield

As this Therukoothu is considered as a ritual and as a process of pleasing the God, they had no separate theatres to enact and all the plays are performed in the courtyards of the temples or open ground areas. They have used simple properties like Dhosis to introduce the characters and printed screens to bring the atmosphere of the play. The centre part of the stage is given to the artists to dance, sing and perform the play and the chorus, musicians and singers are placed in the corner of the stage. *Kattiyakkaran* plays a major role throughout the play he introduces the characters, leads the story and links the relationship between the scenes. The village people need not pay any money to see the play, Therukoothu is created by and for rural people where it entertains and enlightens the people in a more simple way as the village people are.

Kuravanji is also another form folk dance drama which differs in the style of storytelling. It is an oldest form of dance and it refers to a woman who is born in the gypsy family, she sings and she plays an important role of foreteller (Soothsayer). It is one of the 96 prabandha's which is developed in medieval period and belonged to Natakamizh. In most of the poems she appears in the beginning of the poem predicting the future of the Thalaivi (the Queen), whether she unites with the Thalaivan (the king). The theme of kuravanji revolves around love towards God and human.

The Kurathi creates the curiosity of the play and maintains throughout the play. She narrates the story so loud with bright jathis. There are two forms of Kuravanji like "Kuttrala Kuravanji" and "Azhagar Kuravanji". The verses and music used in Kuravanji are simple and native folk. She appears at the beginning of the play and in between to announce the arrival and importance of the dramatis personae to the audience. Most of the Kuttrala Kuravanji revolves around the hero and the heroine. She praises about the beauty of the lady love (Thalavi) and the way she fell in love with the hero (Thalaivan). The Thalavi expresses her feeling to the Chandra (moon), thendral (tender breeze) and kuyil (cuckoo) and the clouds, winds, birds and the moon are sent as a messenger to convey her longing to see the Thalaivan.

The kurathi also has an important role of giving a picturesque description of the mountain range, occupation, tradition, skill, wealth and the beauty of her birth place. Then she reads Thalavi's palm carefully and predicts the future her love affair with her Thalaivan. For this prediction, the Kurathi is rewarded with jewelery and gifts of various kinds. Her main job is forecasting future, healings disease and performing magic. Her folk is engaged in hunting and thus getting food and means for life. As tribal hunters, migrating from place to place, kuravas are fearless, risky and independent people. They are dependent on nature, but at the same time they are attached and grateful to nature. Their speech and songs reflect their independence, love for freedom and worship of nature. For example, in Krishnamari Kuravanji Kurathi takes the heroine to Snake-Goddess, which belongs to pantheistic pantheon of deities identified with natural powers.

This drama is also considered as a ritual and performed in the temples during the festival season. A stage or a mandapa is created in front of the temple, the earliest patron of this art is King Rajaraja Chola, he has created a big platform for them in Thanjavur temple to perform during the festival season. As the Thalaivi belongs to the Kingdom, she is dressed up with bright silk sarees, jewelries made of silver, gold, rubies and emeralds. She is shown so elegant and beautiful. As the kurathi and Kuravan are from tribal community they wore simple ornaments made up of leaves, feathers and cotton clothes. They decorate themselves with simple beads, shells, leaves and flowers. Kurathi has special attire by holding small pouch for betel, magic wand made of wood, basket with medical herbs. Kuravan plays of a hunters leaving in hills carry weapons like spear, bow and arrows, knives, etc. Some other types of Kuravanjis are, Azhagar Kuravanji, Sendil Kuravanji, Viralimalai Kuravanji, Sarabhendra Bhupala Kuravanji, Tyageshar kuravanji, Devendra Kuravanji, Kumbesar Kuravanji.

Sevai Attam is also another folk art which is followed in Tamil Nadu, this form of art is devoted to "Thirumal" the Lord Maha Vishnu. This form of art is performed by Nataka Community. The performer takes an attire of buffoon and performs some unique steps according to the rhythm of "Urumi", "Thappu", "Melam" and "Flute". The traditional song and the graceful movements are the special features of Sevai Attam. It is usually performed once in a year during the festival season and to the victorious return of the Kings Chariot. The soldiers and

female dancers form in lines and dance behind the chariot. The dancers holds kerchief in their hand and swing them in motion to the rhythm of the beat. They dress in traditional form, men in dhoti and shirt; women in sarees draped according to comfort of the dance. Some research scholars have found that the Sevai attam is a combination of “Mutherkuravai and Pintherkuruval”. This Sevai attam stands as a ritual as they are specially performed during festival and in front of the King as a symbol of honour. This form of art is been passed from generation to generation as a symbol of pride.

India is a land filled with lots of tradition and heritage. All these cultures are followed with a deep meaning which serves as a protector of mankind. It adds colour and meaning to mankind. There are many art forms which explore and bring out the inner thoughts and ambition. Unlike the other forms of arts like dance, painting, singing, archery, martial arts and so on, dramas places a vital role in entertaining and enlightening the minds of the common people. This folk drama can be of any form like story telling in Villupattu, reciting verses in Therukoothu but their main aim is to reach people and entertain them and this medium is slowly used as medium to take things directly to the people. Many revolutionary changes have started from this stage. These folk dramas will always stays in the culture of Tamilians as they are considered as primary ritual. The form can be change due to modernisation but the rituals and belief will always stays the same as they are interlinked with culture.

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